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## ROMAN CONSTITUTIONAL HISTORY IN OUR HIGH SCHOOLS<sup>1</sup>

I do not propose to suggest any changes in our college-entrance requirements. I make this statement of my negative purpose at the outset, in order to disarm at once opposition from those outside the classical field. I am not going to encroach on their domain. The appeal is to classical teachers, to consider seriously a phase of our work that has heretofore been neglected. That such an appeal will not be in vain, if it commends itself to the judgment of those addressed, is proved by their ready response in past years to suggestions of a similar nature.

How shall we train a student so that he may, in the best way, meet and overcome the difficulties of life after he leaves school? I think it is a fair proposition to assert that the opponents of classical culture must show by something more than *a priori* arguments the superiority of any substitute for what we have been and are now doing by way of answer to this question, before they ask us to accept these substitutes. The general prevalence of Latin as the staple of language instruction in our secondary schools is certainly an exceedingly significant fact. It means, I should say, that it has been found by practical experience to meet our wants in such a way as to satisfy a large number of sensible people. This does not mean that whatever is, is right. It certainly does mean, however, that whatever is, has a reason for its existence, unless, with the pessimist, we are going to take refuge in unreason. I shall take it for granted then, that the pedagogical values of our Latin work in some respects are settled, and after merely calling attention to them shall ask whether a slight addition can be made to them without detracting from the efficacy of what we are now doing.

<sup>1</sup> A paper read at the Classical Conference in connection with the Michigan Schoolmasters' Club, March 30, 1899.

Why are so many people studying and teaching Latin? The answer to this question must take into account both the high-school student who is not going to college and the college-preparatory student. The answer that first springs to our lips is, "for the discipline;" and rightly, too, for this is and ever must be the main object of our work. If what I say in this paper should seem in any way to interfere with this disciplinary aim it would better never have been written or read. No unprejudiced observer can deny that we do get a certain well-defined result from our Latin teaching, and so long as he has daily before his eyes the evidence of such abundant return, no sensible teacher will ever give up the systematic, painstaking study of syntax, or even the much-maligned gerund-grinding.

That the disciplinary effect of Latin training is equally valuable for the boy who goes to college and the one who stays at home, seems to me not to need proof. It is self evident. The painstaking reading of a piece of Latin or Greek, with the nice determination of the shades of meaning of words and the analysis of complex but logical trains of thought, gives that development of the power of accurate observation and keenness of judgment which are equally valuable for the scholar and the business man. One of the most striking proofs that these faculties are developed by language training is that the teachers of the observational sciences are constantly insisting upon some preliminary study of language for their students. As evidence let me cite the two-years requirement in Latin for admission to the B.S. course, a requirement absolutely valueless from the standpoint of the Latinist.

But there is a something or other constantly pressing upon our attention that is called the "practical." I dislike to use the term, for like "natural," "inductive," "liberal," it means a different thing to each individual that uses or hears it. Suppose for our purpose we define it as the something that will have a direct rather than an indirect bearing upon our everyday problems. As a teacher and lover of classical studies I have always—following the tradition of my calling—insisted on the

disciplinary and culture aim of study. But of late years I confess the confidence of my youth in this respect, as in some others, I hope, has begun to yield somewhat to the popular demand that we should bring our subject down from this ethereal region to the level on which most of us are compelled to do our day's work. Discipline is good and culture is good, but aptness in dealing with practical problems is also good. That these elements are sometimes dissevered, no fair-minded observer can deny; that they should be combined, no sensible man can fail to acknowledge. Can we not hold on to our ideals and yet combine with them, in what the philosophers call an organic unity (whatever that may be), the practical also? The college teacher makes a practical demand on the student who comes to him that is very similar to the demand made on the high-school graduate who goes directly to his life work. The professor demands that the student's knowledge shall be coördinated and brought into vital connection with his subsequent work, just as the world demands of the high-school graduate, that his educational training shall have some bearing on his everyday life.

Let me enumerate some of the failures that I have observed in my students to meet this practical demand of the college instructor. To assure the schoolmen that this is not censure of them and their work, I want to say that these criticisms are mainly of the members of the sophomore class who have been for nearly a year under my own instruction, so that the blame is on myself as much as on anyone else. I am sometimes tempted to say that the college student in his sophomore year has no memory, or at least that it is so weakened from lack of exercise, that he utterly refuses to use it, in fact resents as a pedagogical error, any suggestion that it has been given him for a purpose. When I made this querulous remark to the professor of history, he retorted by saying that I, of course, as a classical teacher, might expect to make some demand on the memory of my students. He knew, as a matter of experience, that such a demand on the non-classical student was utterly useless. The experience of each of us indicates that the pedagogical world has gone to the other extreme in its desire to get away from

the old absurd stress on the memory. It is time that we recognize that we are going to an extreme in this direction. To commit to memory mechanically before one understands at all, is absurd; to believe that one has made a subject his own by simply understanding the logical processes involved in it, without fixing the results firmly in mind, is equally fallacious. Now, the simple translation of a piece of text involves an appeal to the memory only within certain comparatively restricted limits. The pupil learns word forms and syntactical relations but does not attempt to hold in mind the content of the work as a whole. The memorizing of grammatical rules is, or should be, completed by the end of the second year and from that time on further demand on the memory is comparatively slight, if we do nothing but translate. Even the memorizing of words as such has fallen into disuse, properly I am inclined to think, but we should have some substitute for it.

This is, however, not the only charge that may be brought against the results of our present methods. The reading of two or three pages of Latin or Greek every day gives the student little training in that very practical, everyday process of picking out the significant things in a mass of material and grouping them in their proper relations. In fact I have found by experience with my advanced classes that some who have been my best students as long as they are kept at mere translation work are quite likely to fail in what at first, *i. e.*, before actual trial, seemed to me a very simple task, namely, to read a book and report on the salient points.

I do not wish to be understood as saying that these shortcomings are peculiar to classically trained students, simply because I take my examples from the only source open to me, my own classes. I do want to insist, however, that because we already do some things well, possibly better than they are done by other methods of training, we have no reason for not recognizing our shortcomings and attempting to correct them, if possible. The responsibility imposed on us in having by far the largest share of the classical student's time in our keeping should stimulate us to increased conscientiousness.

Have we a remedy? Can we teach the classics in such a way as to make more of an appeal to the memory and more of a demand on this power of systematizing knowledge that is unorganized? These two things are really different sides of the same problem. Certainly by insisting upon the increased attention to the memory, I do not mean that a parrot-like ability to recite a list of dates of Roman consuls and emperors is especially desirable, nor, on the other hand, that the mute inglorious Milton who "knows it but can't say it" is an especially commendable individual. The thing that each of us wants in his students is ability to see vital relations, group the subject-matter in accordance with them and last, but not least, present them clearly; and one part of the process is practically useless unless supplemented by the other.

In doing this we must be sure that we do not lose our grasp on what we have already attained. We must not give up the careful reading of a text and the minute study of form and syntax for any *a priori* desirable but untested plan. To quote again from a teacher of history "the advantage that your classical student has over others is that he has learned to do one thing thoroughly well." The training in observation and judgment is accomplished by our present method. Let us hold on to it. The question is, can we not get something else in addition?

I believe the greatest—I am tempted to say the only—improvement in pedagogic method in Latin, during my experience as a teacher, is that embodied in Hale's *The Art of Reading Latin*. But I have seen a good many teachers that were ridden by the method therein outlined, who were carefully upsetting every sentence in the Latin order, a procedure which Hale suggests only in case the Latin words do not have their proper meaning in the minds of the pupils. We have all of us, perhaps, felt ourselves somewhat overtaxed by the necessary corollary of that method, namely, the rigid insistence on correct natural quantity. But when this is looked upon not as an end in itself but as a means to that end, *i. e.*, the acquiring of the ability to read Latin as Latin, the fruitfulness of the method cannot be denied.

I remember that ten years ago there was some doubt expressed by teachers as to whether the time taken in the reading of Latin and the study of quantity wouldn't be subtracted "in toto" from that necessary for the study of the omnipresent subjunctive and "oratio obliqua." Our experience has taught us that this is not so, but, on the contrary, the understanding of what the author is really aiming at, when he is talking indirect discourse, is so much helped by following him continuously in his talk, that our analysis may frequently be dispensed with, and the time required by this process saved. We have in this case lost no time by turning our attention away from the logical processes involved in the study of Latin construction, but have actually helped those processes by putting the greater stress on the practical study of the art of reading Latin. If there are to be further improvements in our Latin pedagogic method, they must be along this line, *i. e.*, not discarding the old and time-tested devices, but supplementing them.

There has been a good deal of talk of late years of "enriching" our classical course. The term is borrowed, I believe, from a report of one of our educational committees. This is admitted by all to be desirable. Can we accomplish it, holding on to what is good in our present methods, and at the same time correct the defects that have been mentioned? I think we can, if we will only turn our attention to that side of Roman life that has the most significance for the modern world. Curiously enough, we seem to have missed this almost entirely in the past. We hear and read a good deal about the charms of Latin literature, as such, and no sane man would deny the value of Virgil, with his dignity of form and tenderness of feeling; of Ovid, with his light and graceful touch; of Cicero, with his majesty of thought and vigor of expression; or even of Caesar, with his sturdy virility. But is this the side of our subject that should be brought into especial prominence? I do not mean, of course, that we should not continue to study Roman literature for its own sake, but I do wish to suggest that we have not turned our attention to what is preëminently the contribution of Rome to the modern world. The Greeks said things better, perhaps, than

they can be said again, but the Romans did things, and their actions and the record of them in their history and institutions are, for us, the most profoundly significant features of their life. If, paraphrasing Boeckh, the aim of Latin study is the ideal reconstruction of Roman civilization, shall we pass by the most striking characteristic of that civilization?

Why have we not seen, and why do we not emphasize, the practical bearing of the experience of the Romans, in the making and governing of their republic, upon our own nineteenth century experiment? Of course we must avoid here the use of superficial and deceptive analogies between the old and the new. The division of Roman constitutional forms into those falling under the three heads of the magistracy, the senate, and the people has had, doubtless, an effect in developing our triune division of governmental institutions, the executive, legislative, and judicial — just how much it would be beyond the scope of this paper to trace out — but as soon as we attempt to push that analogy beyond this fundamental fact we get into some serious difficulties. The recognition, however, that the principle is the same, that a good democratic form of government is one in which there is a proper coördination and subordination of powers, is a fact of comparative constitutional history that is certainly of great value.

If analogies are difficult to make and dangerous to act upon, we have many direct experiments in government made by the Romans, the result of which may be made immediately useful to the practical politician of the end of the century. The wholesale giving of alms, in the form of cheap food, with its inevitable result of pauperizing the proletariat at Rome, and incidentally exhausting the provinces to feed the unproductive city, is likely to show to almost any thoughtful pupil, that our modern experiments along similar lines may not be altogether safe. To go a little further down into the history of the empire, even a cursory study of the utter futility of the edict of Diocletian, fixing prices for commodities, backed up though it was by the whole power of a fully organized despotism, might suggest that similar experiments by a nineteenth-century republic were foredoomed



to failure. To give a more concrete example, the modern political boss with his familiar tricks for thwarting the popular will, while theoretically most subservient to it, may be seen plainly mirrored in the average Roman senator, in his career through the *cursus honorum*, with his manipulation of the *populus Romanus carissimus*. If history does repeat itself, we may conclude that government of the people by the politicians is but a step in the direction of the government of the people by the one "boss," whom the Romans at first euphemistically entitled *princeps*, but afterwards *dominus, divus*.

These practical lessons from Roman political history for the guidance of a boy who is immediately to become a citizen of our modern republic are exactly what the teacher in college asks for as a means of remedying the deficiencies that have been mentioned. A vigorous and not too minute study of Roman constitutional antiquities—Roman civil government, if you please—may be made a valuable training in that larger memory exercise which includes or rather presupposes the proper coördination of a mass of facts in regard to the growth of constitutional forms.

The study of Roman constitutional history has some decided advantages over the claims of a kindred subject in the classical field that is pressing itself upon our attention, namely, the study of private antiquities. In the first place it lends itself more readily to systematic presentation, and for that reason is better adapted to teaching in the high school. Then, the material can be more readily procured. The Roman constitution can be taught well from a good text-book, when we get one, with the supplementary helps of the ordinary Roman histories and dictionaries of antiquities. These are within the reach of all of our high schools; the materials for private antiquities are expensive and not easily procured. Further, the preparation for the teaching of it can more readily be made in this country. The proper teaching of private antiquities almost of necessity presupposes acquaintance at first hand with much material that is not easily accessible on this side of the water. Finally and most important of all, it articulates with our present

classical course much more accurately than does the kindred subject. The attempt of a few years ago to banish Caesar from our course has resulted, as is usually the case in such movements, in a compromise. We keep a portion of the Caesar, but make the transition from the Latin lessons with some book of easy reading. Our classical course is likely to retain as staples this "Reader," then Caesar, Cicero, Virgil. With no one of these does the subject of private antiquities readily ally itself. In the "Reader" the attention of the pupil should not be diverted too much from the forms and syntax. Caesar and Cicero are not by nature well suited to a coördinate study of Roman private life. Virgil, or perhaps Ovid, might be made the vehicle for carrying instruction in this subject. I believe, however, that the advocates of mythology are going to claim the extra time of the fourth year, and I myself feel that we should reserve at least one course in the high school for the study of pure literature. Let us read our Virgil as literature, in the original Latin, and then turn it into the best literary English at our command, and do nothing during this period that will turn the attention of the pupils away from this purely culture object.

On the other hand, one of our stock authors, Cicero, lends himself most readily to this supplementary study of Roman institutions. In fact he cannot be read intelligently without some elementary knowledge of them.

How shall we accomplish this desirable end? I am still old fashioned enough to believe that the ideal teaching, in the elements of a subject at least, is that based on some good text, with proper supplement, to be sure, by teacher and outside reference. Our first difficulty then is lack of a suitable text-book. That this difficulty will soon be remedied, if there is a demand for such a book, nobody will doubt, who knows anything about the enterprise of our friends, the bookmakers. An effort has been made to cover this ground in Tighe's little book on *The Development of the Roman Constitution*, but this has the defects inseparable from any attempt to present so large and complicated a subject in so small a compass. The same may be said with even more force of the various efforts to meet

this demand in the introductions to several of the more recent editions of Cicero's orations. Most of those that I have examined are misleading because of insufficiency of statement of fact. Some are not free from positive misstatements. The subject must be treated seriously, if at all.

Intimately connected with the subject of a suitable text-book is the question as to place in the course. It is here particularly that I look for suggestions or criticisms from members of the club. I believe that an outline of Roman constitutional history can be taught in twenty lessons. It should be given during the Cicero year. That there is a crevice in the course large enough to receive it is certain. It is an almost universal practice in the good schools to read more than the college requirements. The work throughout the course has improved decidedly during the last few years, and the time saved by this improvement in our pedagogical methods should be utilized in the best way possible.

This work in the Roman constitution will not be a real addition to the work now required of students. In fact I am inclined to think that if a short systematic course were given in the subject, early in the Cicero year, the advantage gained in clearness of comprehension of the political and governmental setting of Cicero's speeches would save all the time required for the short course suggested, even within this year.

Finally, there is a future for the subject. That it has so little of a past seems to me rather a surprising anomaly. The reason may be a mechanical one, to a considerable extent at least. Mommsen's *Staatsrecht* and works of a similar nature by Lange, Herzog, Schiller, Willems, Bouché-Leclercq and others were not possible until the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* was well under way, and this has become an actuality only within the life of this generation. Then, because these books have not been turned into English, although the translation of the *Staatsrecht* was promised us some years ago, their great store of knowledge has never passed much beyond the narrow circle of specialists. If one may judge by the annotations of our texts and the stock articles on Roman institutions in our books of reference, the Latin

scholars, too, have neglected even these excellent secondary authorities on this subject.

It has taken a good many years of the sometimes wearisome reiteration of Freeman and his school to make us realize that there is a real organic connection between the ancient world and the modern, and not a mere tonic, culture influence of the former on the latter. It is certainly time we turned our attention to this subject of Roman Institutions, which brings out so clearly this organic relation of the classical past to our own present. It can be made almost as faithful in suggestions for the student of today as is the study of the English constitution.

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